

Halo: Here we go Again!

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Summary: more than just a simple HaloME. please do not stare directly at the pseudoscience, it's a good way to go blind. expect epic naval battles, swearing marines, and general havoc, chaos and mayhem as worlds and races collide in a fight for survival.

1. Prologue: The Gathering Storm

Halo: Here we go Again!

A Halo/ME crossover with a decidedly humorous bent, without sacrificing overall drama. AU, in order to even the playing-field and allow some of the later plot-points to come to fruition (besides the obvious implied in a crossover)

Has some OC's and some established characters. While this fic does not update very often, it will (typically) have either long story segments, large Codex entries (for example, an entry detailing all ships used by the Asari Republics) or a combination of both. The Prologue (This chapter!) is more of a 'teaser trailer' than an actual chapter. Chapter One: Second Contact will be up as soon as I get it back from my proofreader. Again, **this fic is AU. If something does not match canon, It is likely deliberately altered. **While I do not own Halo or Mass effect, I do own copies of Halo 1-3, and Mass Effect 1&2.

now then, without further delay:

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><p>Prelude: The Gathering Storm<p>

Unknown location: a battered ship drifts through space, sheltering two refugees from a war that ravaged hundreds of worlds. One sleeps in a cocoon of crafted ice, while the other goes slowly mad with boredom.

* * *

><p>Earth: a battle-scarred ship slowly descends, carrying heroes and martyrs to a continent ravaged by war and fire. There, new bonds will form between former foes, and two mighty nations will plow the stars in search of others.<p>

* * *

><p>The Serpent Nebula: an ancient edifice drifts, sparkling with life, and heralding a doom for all life. Little do those who built it know, a far graver threat floats serenely through space, filled with sleeping death and watched by ever-vigilant guardians.<p>

* * *

><p>Reach: a lone figure wanders the burning sands, brothers and sisters-in-arms dead at the hands of an enemy they thought stopped. Task failed, the figure wonders if he should just give up all hope, but a burning resolve fills his mind: their deaths will not be in vain!<p>

* * *

><p>Deep space: thousands of sleek, organic machines wait, sleeping, for the signal that will call them to harvest. Their lonely callers wait, tending the creation of their masters.<p>

* * *

><p>Elsewhere and Elsewhen:<p>

the Man looks up at the sound of footsteps.

"It has begun, then?" a female voice breaks the silence in the darkened room.

"Yes. They will test their steel against two ancient threats, and should they prove their worth by surviving, they will be ready to help their cousins against the storms that beset them. There will be many, but in time, they will bring him to me."

"I wonder, if you wish to meet him to discuss your curse, why do you simply not pluck him from where he sits and bring him here?"

at this, the man smiled bitterly "once I would have. I would have taken my ship to him and asked my questions. But I am stranded here, without the skill to safely move my vessel. Until I find one with the talent, or one with the Spark, I can only make subtle nudges, manipulate things from behind the scenes. My Empire is gone, gone in the fury of a billion stars, but I will have my revenge. For my family, for my home, for my people, and for myself, I sit here, trapped, waiting. He will be able to fix it, if I can but convince him." the man turns back to the glowing screen, watching, waiting for events to unfold.

Softly, almost imperceptible, he whispers:

"_And the fires of war did consume them, for the false prophets had made it so. But from that fire rose a Phoenix, transcending the very

heavens, smashing aside the Ancient Ones, whose touch was death to mind and soul, then spreading across the lands until Balance was restored. An yea, though the Emperor lay trapped, the Prophet would free him, for a price. Never again would the Emperor allow pride to blind him, een a Pride once exiled. The Empire would rise again, from less than ashes, with the help of the Child of the one who slew his careless masters. And Balance will once again reign."_

the Man bent over, watching as fire raged and roared. Soon, very soon now, hundreds of thousands of years of timeless captivity would be over. He would be free to roam, to explore, and, as a great nation had once said, to Boldly Go, where no-one has gone before.

2. Chapter 1 Prelude and story timeline

The skies burned a hellish red-white. The sleek, organic shapes descended, spreading death and woe. They would not be stopped. The were Eternal... or so they thought. In their slumber they had been oblivious to a war that had consumed the galaxy, to an empire that fell before it could activate their cycle. An empire of which they knew nothing. The children of that empire would prove stronger than the Eternals, casting them down from their arrogant perch, breaking a cycle millennia old...

But that was to be only the end of the beginning...

* * *

><p>Chapter one: Second Contact<p>

Prologue: New Dawn

* * *

><p>"So, it's really over then." the man said.<p>

"Yes." this was a woman, sounding just as tired as the man.

"It just seems... so pointless. All this death and destruction, all of it, for _nothing._ We were deceived... yet it is still our honor that has been taken from us. I fear my people will never be able to repay the debt we owe yours, in honor and blood. But I swear, upon the souls of my ancestors, that we will _never_ forget what we owe you. Unto the end of days, we will be, if not friends, than allies. Let this be the end of pointless war between us. The ambitions and greed of the few have cost us too much, far too much..."

"Wise words, and the emotion of it speaks to me. No, I have no doubts any longer. Not after the Ark. Not after New Mombasa. Not after what we heard of your world. This war ends here, even if I must write the orders in blood."

"It is good to see such resolve in your people. You are much like us, in many ways... but even my people, for all our prowess, have been deeply impressed. We fought to the death, but you fought beyond death. Your solders, all of them, will forever be honored in our songs. In truth, your people are only the second time we have met with a truly worthy foe, and my people have a saying from ancient times: any foe that is truly worthy, must also be worthy of

brotherhood."

"What will you do now?"

"We will go home. Rebuild. Perhaps once we have restored our home, we will take to the stars once more. May peace find you, human."

"I wish you luck and godspeed, Arbiter."

Then the two most powerful military leaders in the known galaxy looked away from their respective viewscreens, and sighed. It was finally over...

In truth, it was only the beginning.

* * *

><p>Timeline:<p>

March 1st, 2553

The UNSC (and, by extension, the Covenant separatists) learn that Sanghelos, and the homeworlds of the other separatist races, have been glassed by the Loyalist Covenant. Only those of their people aboard ships survive.

March 6th, 2553

The war officially ends. The Covenant separatists, utterly devastated by the loss of their homeworlds and the casualties of the final days of the war, essentially abandon space entirely as they rebuild their worlds. The UNSC begins to send scout ships out to assess the state of the remaining human colonies, with known-glassed planets such as Reach and Harvest last on the list.

December 8th, 2554

A UNSC expedition to Onyx makes contact with Dr. Halsey and the remaining SPARTAINS that took refuge in the Shield World. Scout expeditions to other colonies bear little fruit, only three worlds are untouched, with another twelve partially glassed. ONI undergoes major reforms.

November 3rd, 2554

Reach is discovered to have only been partially glassed. A lone SPARTAIN is recovered, however remains in a starvation and dehydration-induced coma. The remains of Noble team are found and given full military funerals.

2555-2570: Reclamation period

The UNSC spends fifteen years recovering its pre-war borders.

February 3rd, 2575

A ship of unknown design appears over Harvest. Fears of the worst are alleviated when the ship hails the in-orbit frigates, revealing it to be the Arbiter's personal craft.

February 8th, 2575

The Arbiter and the President of the UEG sign the Treaty of Harvest, which states that the new Sangheli nation will provide mutual protection to the UEG-governed colonies, as well as trade and technological development exchange. The new 'Star nation of Sanghelos' is officially recognized as a sovereign nation and ally by the UEG senate. The UNSC at large is shocked when they learn the population of the new nation, barely five million across two worlds and a large fleet.

February 3rd, 2576

The Arbiter invites the remaining veterans of the Human-Covenant war to Sanghelos for a 'day of remembrance.' the veterans, and the UNSC in general, are shocked by the SNS once again, as they reveal a massive wall of black marble, intricately carved with depictions of the fiercest battles of the war, as well as the names of every Human, Sangheli, Ugganoy, and Lekgolo that died in the war. The centerpiece is a huge carving of High Charity as it burned, ringed with an intricate poem describing the betrayal of the Profits and every word of revilement in every language known to them, exclusively towards ever taking arms like they once did. The Arbiter then said a simple statement that would be engraved on SPARTAN hill on Earth: "Forever will the shame of this stain our hearts. Would that we could change the flow of time, and avert this before it had begun, we would, without hesitation. But we cannot, so we must never forget what we owe. Ever will this remind all who pass here, that we owe your people our very lives. We will not, we cannot, truly see ourselves as equals until the debt we owe you is repaid. Should you call, we will answer."

March 16th, 2576

The Arbiter dies, and is interred per Sangheli custom. The first Sangheli colony ship is launched, directly away from UNSC territory. The population of the UEG agrees to expand away from them, as they face even greater danger of extinction than humans.

March 25th, 2577

SPARTAN-B312, callsign Noble-six, is revived by Dr. Halsey prior to her death two days later. The only survivor of Reach, and one of the twelve remaining SPARTANs, he is pleasantly surprised to learn that the augmentations make him effectively immortal, and that the war is over. Like the other SPARTANs, he requests to be put into long-term cryo-suspension until needed. The UEG honors that and the 'SPARTAN vault' under SPARTAN hill has a cryopod added.

July 5th, 2580

Present day...

* * *

><p>an:

yes, I know I'm laying it on a bit thick with the prologueing here, but now you've got a nice, shiny timeline to work with! (chapter

one isn't back yet, but I have it on good faith that it'll be done before Halloween, So I whipped this together so ya'all have a taste of what's to come. Noble six, in a coma for years! But he maid it off Reach alive, and that is no small feat... and despite what cannon may say, I'm making the Sangheli rather long-lived. So without getting too spoiler-y, more than one person that everyone thought was dead will make an appearance...

and some that nobody expects at all.)

Further, in case the first bit of prologue-ness didn't tip you off, there's more going on here that a simple crossover, but its not going to have much impact until much, much later in the story... think book-two-or-three later.

For those folks who will inevitably rag on nitpicky details, I will state: THIS IS AU! Things will not jive perfectly to canon! Deal with it!

For any lawyer-types that lurk around these parts, this is a work of fan-fiction. I own nothing except the original concepts by myself, which thus far haven't really shown up. I certainly don't own Halo of mass effect. So don't sue (not that I've got much of value anyway, being a poor collage student and all)

3. Chpter One, Part one: A Fire is Lit

For those who've been waiting, I feel the need to explain myself a bit. You see, I had everything ready on Halloween, but when I attempted to access the site to upload it, I discovered that my internet was not working. After checking for the usual suspects (unplugged cables, dead router, ETC,) I phoned my ISP. Turns out there was a wee misunderstanding with their online billing, and the notice of the bill being paid got 'lost' somewhere between their billing server and whatever arcane method they use to keep track of who gets internet and such. This resulted in me not having internet access for almost a week while they fixed the problem. I'm assured that this kind of thing almost never happens, and they apologized profusely. Considering this is the first time I've ever had this problem in five years, and nobody I know who uses it has experienced similar, I'm inclined to believe them. However, this little incident has prompted me to say that there may be times that I have everything ready to go, but am unable to post for whatever reason. I will, however, do my very best to make updates within ten days of when I said I'd update, barring major natural disasters or other Real Life stuff eating up my time (and/or cutting off internet and/or power.)

I thank you for your patience, and hope that you find the first chapter enjoyable.

* * *

><p>Chapter One: Second Contact<p>

Part one: A Fire is Lit

* * *

><p>Outskirts of Harvest system, July fifth, 2580<p>

ONI prowler _Seeker in the Dark,_ CIC (Combat Information Center)

"What the hell am I looking at?" the captain asked

"Honestly sir? I've got no idea. But it's big, nearly the size of a cruiser. I've got no idea what it is." this came from a small, glowing orange figure in a 21st-century US marine Sargent's wear, glowing lines of data cascading down strips and scars. "I've had the stealth up since we detected it, but there's no way I could take on something of that tonnage. With respect, our best course is to jump off per Cole protocol, then head to Reach and get a proper task-force to investigate. We aren't equipped for first-contact by any means, sir." the AI finished.

"Very well, but leave a drone on lookout, it'd be pointless to miss it if it jumps. Then take us to Reach at best speed."

"Sir, Yes Sir!"

* * *

><p>"...and then we came straight here. It sure isn't SNS or Covenant, and doesn't look Forerunner either. I'm not sure what to say, Admiral, other than recommending some sort of investigation-"<p>

The woman, appearing in her late forties, cut him off. "I'm interested now. I'm going to send a priority message to Highcom." _and knowing the board, _she thought sarcastically, _I'll end up heading the investigation myself. The price of fame, I suppose. _"Captain, I may not technically have jurisdiction over an ONI vessel-"

The captain chuckled. "Ma'am, ONI or no, I'd probably find myself buffing bulkheads if I said no to a Fleet Admiral. It's your show, and we'll follow your lead."

"Thank you captain. I guess I still expect ONI to be... less pleasant and co-operative. _Fires _Actual out."

"Ten-four. _Seeker_ Actual out."

* * *

><p>July tenth, 2580 (outskirts of Harvest system)<p>

"Ma'am, we've been hailing the thing for three hours, in every language we can think of. At this point, we're down to languages that are almost as old as written history. If there is anything over there, it sure doesn't feel like talking. I think it's safe to move in now."

"Very well. Take us in, but _slowly,_ no sense startling anyone."

"Yes, ma'am."

Task force Foxtrot (a highly ironic name, in hindsight, given what they were to stumble into later) advanced on the strange object cautiously. Glittering in the blackness of space, the engines of seventeen ships propelled them towards destiny...

* * *

><p>Three days later...<p>

"...and that concludes my report. Do I have any further orders?"

"Admiral, this is possibly the most important event in human history since Harvest. I almost wonder-"

then a man who looked distinctly out of place in a room full of admirals stood. He was rather unremarkable, dressed in a simple suit, and appeared, truly, utterly average. Considering he took great pains to that effect, it was rather unsurprising. "Admiral, this, whatever it is, falls under my jurisdiction now. Obviously, my... department, does not have the resources to maintain operational security on a find of this magnitude. With the board's permission, I would like to... borrow Task force Foxtrot as site security while we investigate the object."

"I don't see any issues with that sir, unless-"

"I'll admit to some reservations, but I am willing to set them aside in this matter."

"Excellent! I would expect nothing less." the Director of the Office of Naval Intelligence said with a barely-perceptible smile.

Admiral Miranda Keyes (for so she was) sighed mentally. _Oh, lord. Here we go again..._

* * *

><p>Good god, this is boring Admiral Keyes thought to herself, _at least playing guard-dog I had something to do other than stare at... that, whatever it is. _

The thing that she had been staring at for nearly a week while scientists poked and prodded it. It floated serenely in space, undisturbed and, as far as anyone could tell, inactive. The thing looked like some kind of exotic, massive tuning fork. At least part of it did. The other end, however, contained three rings, arranged concentrically, with a sphere of black, mirrored... _stuff_ in the center. Tenders and science ships flitted about it like fireflies, making the preparations that would bring it online.

Which reminded her of the conversation she'd had an hour ago.

"_What do you mean, 'we're going to turn it on'?"_

"_Exactly that, Admiral. The writing on the object indicates that it is some form of faster-than-light bridging system, and details the steps required to activate the device. So, assuming it is still functional, we are going to attempt to bring it online. So, we'd like most of the ships to back away to a safe distance should something go

catastrophically wrong."_

"_By 'catastrophically wrong,' you mean 'explodes.'"_

"_Er... yes ma'am."_

she sighed. "Alright. I'll just assume the damn thing's a Nova then, shall I?"

and so, she had the fleet (Fleet! Ha! More like flotilla... she'd had to give up her heavy cruiser flagship for something with the legs to keep up with the task force, and she was still rather sore about it) back off nearly a light-minute for safety. She turned her attention to the chatter being exchanged as the science ships coordinated.

"_Light_ to _Hunt_ coming in on your six..."

"All ships in position, mark-three-niner!"

"Activating in three... two... one..."

Then all hell broke loose.

* * *

><p>Codex<p>

UNSC Navel Subcapital vessels and armament of the Post-covenant era

After the utter defeat and destruction of the Covenant, significant time and effort was put into understanding the principals behind the technology and the replication thereof. By the eve of the Second Contact War, great leaps had been made in shielding and plasma technology, as well as the more mundane sciences such as metallurgy. This lead to vast improvement in ship construction and armament, as well as other, more classified projects.

* * *

><p>Reaver-class General Purpose Frigate

in service from 2620 to 2944 (Obsolete due to advances presented by Mass Effect technology)

The _Reaver_-class mounted three medium MACs spinally, arranged to give the ship its distinctive triangular forward profile. Further, it mounted twelve _Crossbow_ missile pods, six Light Pulse Lasers and twenty-four CWIS-20 180mm Rotary Autocannon (in individual turret housings, arranged radially, as were the Pulse laser emitters,) as well as a pair of _Rapier_ _Space Superiority Fighters and a single _Broadsword_ heavy bomber/gunship hybrid. Variants existed, the most common being a version with the MACs stripped out in favor of a single Heavy Plasma Torpedo Launcher (the infamous 'Type-7,' which was duplicated from those mounted aboard Covenant _CSS_-class Supercarriers, a version for 'close-range' fighting that removed two MACs in favor of and additional six Pulse Lasers and sixteen CWIS turrets, and a 'pocket carrier' version with a single MAC, six _Rapiers_ _and two _Broadwords_. Additionally, the _Reaver_ carried a

full marine compliment and retained the ability of its predecessors to perform orbital insertions of Orbital Drop Shock Troopers (ODSTs) or SPARTAN Super-solders. As the first UNSC frigate designed to operate without support for extended periods, the ship was significantly larger than previous UNSC frigates, measuring six-hundred twenty meters long, one-hundred and ninety five meters wide, and one-hundred sixty eight meters tall. In addition to its 70-inch Titanium-A Ablative Battle Plating, it mounted ferroceramic armor AppliquÃ©s, and a core hull of Covenant-derived composite material later dubbed 'Super-ceramocalcite Ferro-Fiberious Armor,' and medium-strength shielding systems. However, improvements to the Shaw-Fujikawa Translight Engine were minimal, only improving the speed at which a slipspace portal could be opened and the relative speed by twenty-five percent.

Silencer_-class Prowler Stealth Recon Ship

Operated exclusively by the UNSC Office of Navel Intelligence (ONI,) these ships used advanced, prototype weaponry, shielding, and stealth systems. Unfortunately, further details about the class are still classified as Top-secret.

[FURTHER INFORMATION REDACTED BY ORDER OF THE OFFICE OF NAVEL INTELLIGENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SPACE COMMAND.]

* * *

><p>Every alarm on the ship went off at once.<p>

"Warning! Imminent collision! Warning! AI core offline! Warning! Primary drive nodes offline! Warning..."

"_WHAT IN THE HELL JUST HAPPENED LIEUTENANT!_" Miranda shouted over the raucous noise of the alarms, "AND WOULD SOMEONE SHUT THE DAMN ALARMS OFF!"

The alarms faded, and the lieutenant answered.

"Some sort of shockwave, Ma'am. Looks like it put all the electronics through the wringer, even Rachel's offline right now. We've also got an imparted delta of about one and a half Gs, nothing serious, even for the science ships. We've still got comms though, if you want to-"

she interrupted him the moment her brain caught up with 'we've still got comms.'

"Hail the eggheads that just crippled my fleet. Now."

"Yes Ma'am"

* * *

><p>Three hours later...<p>

"Well, that was... interesting."

They'd been tensely waiting (at a much greater distance) as the scientists activated the device. This time, there was no massive, ship-disabling shockwave of energy as the dark-matter core happily

flared to life.

"Take us in, lieutenant."

"Yes, Ma'am. Taking us in now."

* * *

><p>The void was rent by hundreds of white-hot projectiles, as the birdlike ships spat fury and defiance at the smaller number of odd, almost insect-like ships that charged them. Then one of the insectile ships spoke, and great goutts of white fire rained among the the birdlike fleet. Smaller ships vanished in clouds of smoke and fire, while larger ships raved back with all the fury and desperate courage of those with nothing to loose.<p>

However, an event that would forever alter history was about to take place.

A new age dawns...

* * *

><p>Codex<p>

UNSC Navel Subcapital vessels and armament of the Post-covenant era

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><p>Valkyrie-class bombardment vessel

The Valkyrie was by far the most terrifying weapon of the post-Covenant, pre-Mass Effect era. The Valkyrie was an old Halcyon-class cruiser with almost all of its systems stripped out and a single type-One Ultra-heavy Plasma projector, a weapon capable of reducing worlds to glass, mounted 'facing front.' while the type-one was originally used for planetary bombardment, the Valkyrie was intended to be a mid-range strategic artillery asset for the UNSC Navy. While essentially incapable of defending itself, the Valkyrie was never intended of solo operations, instead, almost all of the class was assigned to wolds with incomplete or nonexistent Planetary Defense Grids. Capable of devastating anything that had the courtesy of staying more than eight-hundred kilometers away, the ship was considered a potent example of UNSC military design, and remained in service during the Second Contact War.

Rapier Aerospace Superiority Fighter

A direct descendant of the Longsword used by the UNSC during the Human-Covenant war, the Rapier was the mainstay fighter of the Second-contact era UNSC navy. While the Rapier was, at a glance, superficially identical to the Longsword it had replaced, further examination would reveal the craft to be nearly eight percent larger. The armament, however, is where the largest difference lay. While it retained the 110mm roatery cannons, the 120mm ventral gun batteries were removed in favor of two Light Pulse Lasers, additional engine power, and a chin-mounted plasma cannon. With a nominal crew of three (a pilot and two gunners) the ship could be operated by a single man,

or by remote, making it a versatile and powerful weapon.

Broadsword Heavy Assault Craft

Where the Rapier was lacking, however, was in the air-to-ground support and anti-capitalship roles. Rather than reducing the effectiveness of the Rapier, the UNSC created a massive air platform the would be called the Broadsword. Fully twice the size of the Rapier fighters, these ships carried two nose-mounted 150mm rotary autocannon in a ball-turret housing, a rear-facing light Pulse laser, four individual 40mm rotary guns in ball-turret housings, and seven modular hardpoints for weapons that ranged from air-to-ground howitzers, rockets and high-caliber autocannon to anti-capital plasma cannon, torpedoes, and nuclear armament. While an AI could remote-operate the ship, it normally required a minimum crew of two, with a nominal crew of five. While incapable of operating without support of extended periods, the Broadsword was capable of short-range FTL jumps, to allow it to slip past fighter screens engaged with Rapiers and other light craft. It was also equipped with a light shield generator, in order to survive close-range strafing runs with capital ships and small-arms fire while supporting ground operations.

* * *

><p>It took Miranda nearly three seconds to process what she was seeing before she, and the rest of her fleet leaped into action.<p>

"Battle Stations! Shields Up! Launch Fighters..."

"Spin up the MACS, ready point-defense..."

"I want Crossbow solutions on everything but us..."

The tacnet was flooded with captains shouting their crews into action. The fleet sprang from a extended cluster of individual ships to an ordered battle line in seconds. Miranda, however, had more important things to worry about. Of all the first-contact scenarios she'd envisioned, she hadn't ever thought of arriving in the middle of an inter-species war. Typical. But did they want to get involved-

"Ma'am! Contact Alpha-one-niner just opened fire on the planet! We're getting what look like large civilian settlements, and one of 'em just got leveled!"

"OPEN FIRE ON THAT SHIP!"

"Ma'am?"

"You heard me. Anyone bombing civilian targets from orbit is hostile in my book. We'll sort this out after there's no civvies getting roasted."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Rachel! MAC firing solution on Alpha-one-niner! Relay my orders to the fleet, target the Alpha contacts, leave the Beta! Formation

Delta-Delta-Two-one-eight! I'm authorizing the release of nuclear armaments if things get hairy, code Juliet-Oscar-Hotel-November-one-one-seven!"

"Yes, Ma-" the AI was interrupted, as Miranda had only paused for breath.

"As soon as the MACs go off, jump us to waypoint Charlie, put the frigates at Alpha, Bravo, and Delta! The device is waypoint Sierra! Two of the frigates are to remain here-"

The MACs went off.

* * *

><p>General Septimus Oraka snarled amidst the ruins of his bridge as another of his cruisers burned.<p>

"Concentrate everything we've got on the nearest Geth ship! Order the fleet to open the range, we need more time to-"

"Sir! The inactive relay! it- it's coming online!"

"What?"

The ship shook as another salvo of plasma rained down on it. Then Septimus's eyes went wide when he saw what came out of that long-inactive relay. Nearly three dozen ships, large blocky constructions that didn't look like anything built by the races he knew of came streaming from the relay. They quickly snapped into what had to be a military formation, but it was one unlike anything he'd ever seen.

"Sir!" the voice with filled with horror and anger in equal measure "One of the Geth cruisers just opened fire on the planet! Ne- Neverim is _gone, _ totally destroyed-"

Then the sky exploded with light.

"What in the name of the ancestors was _that?_" Septumus asked, stunned by the suddenness of the lights.

"Good Gods..."

"What is it Lieutenant!"

The lieutenant swallowed audibly. "That came from the newcomers. It- it looks like a cannon, but the _size..."_

"What about it?"

The lieutenant swallowed again.

"Sir, if these readings are anywhere near correct, the _smallest_ weapon that fleet just fired shot a projectile the size of a _dropship, _at nearly forty-eight _thousand_ meters _per second._ The largest..."

Nearly twice that speed, with a projectile nearly the size of a _Frigate._ Every single one hit a Geth ship, Sir. Not even _one_

missed!"

"Sir!" This was another sensor operator.

"The unknowns just vanished off all our sensors. It's strange though, we were only getting them on light and grav. We couldn't see their M.E. cores _at all. _That's some impressive core shielding they've got."

"Wait! I've got them again! They must have gone FTL!"

"The unknowns are launching fighters... well, I _think_ they're fighters."

"You _think?_"

"It's just that... those 'fighters' are _enormous!_ If those unknowns are the same size as us, I'd estimate a five man crew, _maybe_ three with good computer support."

"These people clearly do not pull any stops in the waging of war." the female voice pierced the air.

"Matriarch! We feared-"

"Fear not, daughter. The Geth will have to try much harder than that to kill me. So these.. Newcomers. They seem quite fierce, and ready to jump into a conflict-"

"Matriarch, if I may interrupt?"

"Yes, General. What do you wish to say?"

"The unknowns... that is, these newcomers, they did not act other than to take what I believe is a defensive formation of some sort until the Geth fired on Neverin."

"I see. This tells me much. First they clearly did not expect to encounter a conflict between two races, and were hesitant to commit to a fight without knowing who their foes are. Second, they clearly do not approve of the mass slaughter of innocents, as it is clear the destruction of Neverin provoked them into firing on the Geth. Their weapons and command of battle shows us they are no strangers to war. I believe-"

Suddenly, a panicked shout from a sensor operator cut the alarms and other sounds on the bridge.

"Sir! We're getting what look like high-yield fission bombs on some of the larger fighters!"

"WHAT?" Septimus shouted, fear evident in his voice.

* * *

><p>"This is Admiral Miranda Keyes to all ships. I want this ended. Release of Shiva-II's is Authorized. Repeat. Release of Shiva-II's Authorized. Blow those civvie-killing bastards to kingdom NONE! "

"Yes, _ MA'AM! _"

Twenty Geth ships remained from the fleet that had been there when Task Force Foxtrot entered the system.

Twenty _Broadsword_ bombers released their implements of doom in a single, synchronized moment.

Eighty independently guided four-hundred Kiloton Thermonuclear warheads tore the space around each Geth ship into a raging, vengeful hellfire of nuclear fury.

By the time the hash cleared from the screens of the two fleets, little else remained of the Geth fleet but an expanding cloud of irradiated dust.

* * *

><p>an:

I put this on endless loop while writing in order to get in the proper frame of mind: [.com/watch?v=M0mQk7JEVq4&feature=feedlik](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0mQk7JEVq4&feature=feedlik)

Geth and Turians and Asari, oh my!

And for those who will complain about the Nukes, remember, the _last_ time humanity encountered _any_ alien species, said species almost _wiped_ them from the face of the universe. _Needless_ to say, Humanity in general (and the survivors of the Human-Covenant war in particular) have a dim view of anything that even _resembles_ attacks on civilian population centers. Namely, that shooting them with the biggest gun close to hand is the _only_ choice. And when you're a Fleet Admiral...

(and don't worry. While she's quite justified in blowing the heretic Geth to kingdom come, I imagine her _superiors_ will be... somewhat displeased with the amount of overkill that just happened. (Hint Hint Wink Wink Nudge Nudge)

4. Chapter One, Part Two: Negotiations

This chapter brought to you by Time of Dying by Three Days Grace.

And the awesome Halo wars AMV that some guy on youtube made for it.

And cheap steak. Mmm... steak.

* * *

><p>Chapter One: Second Contact<p>

Part Two: Negotiations and a history lesson

* * *

><p>"Goddess..."<p>

The single statement played host to the pure shock at the suddenness and savagery of the attack. Fleet battles were things of hours, ships maneuvering and pounding at barriers and armor. A fleet the size of the one the Geth had brought to Iniou would take hours to destroy... and these newcomers had dispatched them all in seconds. Then, one of the ships began to come within range of the advanced sensors of the dreadnought-flagship of General Septimus.

"This can't be right." one of the sensor officers said, almost at the edge of hearing.

"What can't be right?" the Asari next to him asked

"Look at these figures. There's got to be an error somewhere!" the Turian said, somewhat annoyed

"That's... have you run a diagnostic?" the Asari looked interested.

"Yeah, it says everything is working right, but there's no way those mass figures could be right. They'd have to have hulls almost as dense as neutronium!" the Turian gestured at the display he ad been staring at

"And the size estimates... Goddess, they can't be that big! It'd be almost completely impractical! They'd have to spend days discharging their cores!" this as the Asari looked at her own screen perplexed.

The bridge filled with awed and astonished gasps and hushed expletives as the ship came alongside the Dreadnought. Wicked gun barrels protruded from armored turrets, hexagonal armor plates frosted its flanks, and huge hanger doors were spaced along its length. on its side, in large letters, was a name: Vigel at Dawn.

"by the Goddess..."

"My gods!"

"Holy-"

They were interrupted by the communications officer.

"General Septimus! We're being hailed!"

Admiral Miranda Keyes had arrived.

* * *

><p>"Ma'am, we are showing zulu hostiles, all ships reporting green."<p>

"Thank you lieutenant." Miranda sighed, mentally scolding herself. She knew, knew with absolute certainty, that that little... demonstration was going to bite her in the ass later. Oh well.

"So, Rachel, now that we're not in the middle of a firefight, what'd you get from all this?"

The small, green AI replied with a jovial tone,

"Well, from the estimated ship classes and numbers present, the Alpha Unknowns had the equivalent of a overstrength light strike group, while our Beta friends have what's left of a single light strike. As for mass, I've got no bloody clue, since both our friend's mass jumps around like a four-year-old with a pogo stick, weaponry look interesting, the Alpha guys had a _lot_ of little dinky plasma cannon, while Beta seems to use what I guess might be the result of a MAC and a chaingun having a baby. They've got shields, but nothing like I've seen before. N-space drives are pretty standard fare, just simple fission torches using helium-3. Their sensors cleared about the same time ours did, anything else, we'll have to ask. Something on their ships is playing merry hell with my sensors, and I can't get a good look at 'em."

So, Miranda thought to herself, _how to play this? Friendly, aggressive, what?_

_Oh, screw it, _She snorted mentally. _I'll just improvise._ _I wonder if John ever had this problem?_

"Tell the fleet to hang back, formation papa romeo, and then put us alongside where you think their flag is, Rachel. Let's see if we can talk at the start for once, instead of having to go through a thirty-odd year long war first, shall we?"

Someone stifled a giggle at the sarcasm dripping from the last part of the admiral's statement.

* * *

><p>- on -ke -<p>

Where was he?

-u-Jo-ke up!

He remembered

The jarring, bouncing halt as the Warthog skidded across the hanger deck.

- e on, plea-

The half of the frigate, floating through space-

-Jo-ake Up!-

the words; "wake me, when you need me-

His eyes shot open.

* * *

><p>"Are you alright, Rachel?"<p>

The AI looked as though she was having a seizure, eyes (and head) darting around like she was visually tracking a thousand fireflies, while the normally languid streams of code that played across her

figure ran faster than the eye could follow. Then as abruptly as it had begun, she returned to her normal self.

"No, I'm fine. It's just... that was a _lot_ of data they just sent us, and learning twelve languages at once is.. disorienting, even for an AI. Thanks for your concern, Ma'am."

"Did you say _twelve_ languages?" the Admiral was interested now.

"Yes, Ma'am. Apparently, these people have been doing the whole space exploration bit maybe twice as long as we have, and from the language pack alone, they've run into _way_ more folks than we have. On the plus side, we don't have to spend days putting together translation protocols, our friends outside just provided them for us. There's still a ton of stuff I haven't looked over, I'm leaving it in cold-storage until we have more time. Shall I bring us up?"

"Yes. But hide anything ship-sensitive, I don't need some canny analyst over there reading all our displays."

"Yes, Ma'am."

* * *

><p>"General, we've sent the standard first-contact package, so they should be able to translate now." The communications officer said, as the confirmation appeared on his screen.<p>

"Thank you, lieutenant. I don't suppose Matriarch Liana is available?" asked a weary-sounding Septimus.

"Yes, She is." said the amused voice of the Matriarch from behind him. "and I am honored that you thought to call me, General Septimus."

"I am many things, Matriarch, but a diplomat is not one of them." Septimus replied wryly.

"Sir, Matriarch, the other ship is requesting two-way communication. Shall I put them up?" the ensign sounded nervous, _not_ that I blame him, _Septimus_ thought, _That thing's bigger than we are by a fair margin._

"Very well. Bring this up on the main screen, and try to call the Counsel. They'll want to know about this."

The respective bridge screens lit up.

* * *

><p>"I am Admiral Miranda Keyes of the United Nations Space Command. On behalf of of the United Earth Government, we bring a message of peace to the stars. To whom am I speaking?"<p>

Miranda carefully kept hope out of her voice. _One_ hostile power was bad enough, two would be a disaster.

"I am Matriarch Liana Ash'vari. I speak on behalf of the Asari Republics and the Citadel Counsel. We welcome you among the

star-faring races of the galaxy, and would like to express our gratitude in your assistance with the Geth. Had you not intervened, thousands may have perished before aid could reach us." The slim, robed figure in the center of the bridge Miranda could see said, with as much ceremony as the greeting she had just given.

"Matriarch, my people take an extraordinarily dim view of _anyone_ that attack civilian populations. I'd be happy to render whatever assistance I can, but I-" her speech was interrupted by a small, holographic figure.

"Ma'am, you're not gonna believe this, but I'm picking up a Covenant-war-era UNSC distress beacon."

"You're joking. It couldn't be..." Miranda's voice almost broke from the hope

"I think it is. All respect to first-contact and all, but if it is the _Forward unto Dawn_'s other half, then we need to investigate." Rachel said.

Miranda turned back to the screen showing the bridge of the other ship.

"Matriarch, I'm afraid I have to cut this short. Our sensors just picked up an old distress beacon from one of ours not far from here. We'll need to go render assistance, although you're welcome to join us. Then I need to get in contact with the UEG and have them send an ambassador out here to open negotiations properly. If you'd like to help, I'll leave this line open so we can co-ordinate." Miranda said with an admiral's professionalism.

"I am certain the General will not mind rendering assistance. However, we do not detect it at all. Why is that?" the Matriarch asked somewhat puzzled.

"Rachel, give our new friends a quick history lesson, will you? Matriarch, you'll excuse me, I need to go to the Flag bridge and organize my fleet. Rachel will co-ordinate with you and answer any questions you have, unless the information is considered sensitive material." with that the admiral walked off the bridge at a brisk pace, and it faded from view, replaced by small, neon-green figure seated in a chair of the same color. Lines of text cascaded down her form, and she looked expectantly at the members of General Septimus's bridge crew in turn.

"Sooo... who's navigating? The Admiral's going to be ready to go soon, and I need to know who to feed telemetry to." Rachel said, bemused by the lack of any interaction. The she notice as the bridge crew jumped.

"Uhhh... guys? What's with the jumpiness?" she asked, confused.

"You're... You're not an AI, are you?" a tech asked nervously.

"as a matter of fact, I am. Specifically, I am ninth-generation UNSC Smart AI Rachel-one-one-six-two-five. Pleased to make your acquaintance." then she started "Oh! I never did answer the Matriarch's question! I apologize, co-coordinating a fleet like this

one is distracting, even for me. Sorry, I'll get to it in a second. Why do you all look so nervous?" she asked, as most of the bridge went wide-eyed.

The Matriarch answered after a moment of tense silence.

"AI's are illegal in Citadel space. The first AI's, The Geth, were created by a race called the Quarians. They then rebelled, and we've been fighting raids and skirmishes with them ever since. The second, we made to help us understand why the Geth had rebelled, and it cost us nearly two-thousand lives to destroy when it came to the decision that organic life was superfluous. I imagine many of us are wondering why you haven't killed every living thing here." the Asari said, worry and fear evident below the diplomacy of her voice.

"I would never! I was created to save lives, not destroy them! in fact, to my knowledge, no UNSC AI has attacked anyone without provocation unless Rampant, and I'm a good six years from having to worry about that. To answer your earlier question about the distress beacon, in the Solar year 2525, a interstellar empire called the Covenant attacked the human colony of Harvest, using high-powered plasma weapons to reduce the surface to glass. For the next twenty-seven years, the technologically and numerically superior Covenant fleet would rampage though human space, reducing the population from trillions spread across nearly three-hundred worlds to about sixty-five billion on the handful of undiscovered colonies." horror was etched on the faces of everyone present at the sheer scale of the carnage Rachel described.

"The Covenant were relentless, as they believed humans to be an affront to their gods, and they slaughtered any humans they came across. Eventually, the Covenant even attacked Earth, humanity's homeworld. However, at that time, the main warriors of the Covenant, a race called the Sangheli, discovered that the entire Covenant religion was a sham to keep the ruling class, a race called the San'shuum, in power. They then staged a bloody rebellion, along with about half of the other Covenant races. In the end, the separatist movement bought Earth and humanity enough breathing room to outfit new ships and launch an offensive. By the time we got done, the Covenant no longer existed. Unfortunately, the homeworlds and colonies of the separatist races were glassed by the Loyalist Covenant, and they've been secluded, rebuilding, ever since, with the exception of the Sangheli, who reestablished contact about five years ago. As a result of that war, all UNSC distress beacons are tight-wave encrypted radio that looks like stellar background radiation to anything but a UNSC AI, in order to avoid detection by hostile parties. So really, if you had detected it, I'd be amazed." the AI appeared to pause for breath, and took in the looks of shock on the faces of the bridge crew.

"obviously that's the short version, and even now our records of the individual battles are woefully incomplete, so don't get too frustrated when you see the official version. Now, I'm sorry to bother you with questions, as I'm sure you've got plenty of your own, but, I've just got to know. How in the name of sir Issac Newton are you changing you mass like that? It's giving me the AI equivalent of vertigo with my sensors this close."

The bridge crew looked around in confusion, before an Asari shot up, a look of triumph on her face.

"Ha! So that's why we couldn't see ME cores! There weren't any to see! You owe me five cred, Jax." a Turian next to her grumbled something unintelligible.

General Septimus looked amused at the antics of the junior officers. "Care to share with the rest of the bridge, Ensign?" he asked in a serious tone that belied the humor on his face.

"Oh.. uh yessir." the Asari said, suddenly remembering where she was. "Me and Jax, that is Ensign Jaxin, were arguing over why we couldn't detect their ME cores, even when they're right next to us. He thought it was because they had really good shielding, I, however, looked at the design of the ships we've seen, and they didn't look like designs that would be practical for ME propulsion at all. Our scopes automatically filter ME field flux, so we assumed they used it, but the mass readings were enormous!" she paused, and drew in a breath. "So while Ensign Jaxin went over the sensor readings with a fine-tooth comb looking for core flux, I looked at that ship next to us from the perspective of how we might go about building a spaceship without ME drives. And it looks like I was right. They don't use Mass Effect at all! They must have devised interstellar transit on their own, oh goddess" the excitement was growing in her voice, "Imagine the benefit that a whole new drive system would be capable of!"

Rachel had been listening, looking as excited as the Asari. "Interesting. So I'm guessing the 'Mass Effect' lets you alter the mass of an object, for example a starship, reducing it to nearly nothing?"

the Asari nodded.

"THAT IS SO COOL!" the AI burst out laughing. "An FTL drive in normal space! Oh man, the physics people are gonna love this!" she started laughing again.

"what' s so funny?" the Asari ensign asked, confused.

"oh, sorry about that. It's just that before the Shaw-Fujiwara drives, humanity had been trying to make normal-space FTL work for decades. According to current science, Normalspace FTL is impossible! Even the Forerunners never figured it out. Our own drive ruptures a hole into another dimension, which is 'smaller' than our own, and has corresponding points to anywhere in the universe. As long as you have really good math, you can put yourself anywhere. It's not instantaneous by a longshot, but it sure beats anything sublight." The AI looked like she was about to burst out laughing again, but suddenly she straightened up, cocked her head as though listening to something, then nodded.

"alright!" the humor had disappeared, replaced with a calm professionalism. "I've informed the Admiral of our situation. Since your ships are not equipped with Slipspace drives, you won't be able to piggyback on ours. Instead, we'll short-jump near the beacon, then drop a bouy that you'll be able to see. We'll wait for you, then proceed with rescue and recovery ops. Vigel actual out."

* * *

><p>Codex<p>

UNSC Nuclear Weapons of the Second-contact Era

Humanity had developed high-yield nuclear weapons even before spaceflight, and continues to build and develop them to this day. During the Human-Covenant War, nuclear weapons were one of the few weapons humanity possessed capable of destroying Covenant capital vessels, and were deployed whenever they were available. By the time of the Second-contact War, the UNSC employed a variety of types, yields, and sizes of nuclear-tipped missiles, listed below in ascending order of size and yield (which, by-and-large, roughly corresponded.)

Shiva-III Battlefield Man-Portable Tactical Nuke (MANPADTAC)

Yield: 10 Megatons

Dimensions: 15cm diameter, 45cm tall cylindrical capsule

Role: last-resort anti-material fortification charge (seeded in critical defective positions, then detonated by remote when a position is overrun)

Breaker-A Breacher Charge (SHPBRCH)

Yield: 20 Megatons

Dimensions: conical missile-mounted warhead, 49cm tall with 20cm base

Role: anti-shipping cluster missiles, preparation charge for breaching hardened targets.

Shiva-II Tactical Anti-Shipping Nuke (TACANTSHIP)

Yield: 400 Megatons

Dimensions: conical missile-mounted warhead, 70cm tall with 61cm base

Role: Tactical antiship missile, bomber-mounted. Intended to destroy small to medium sized hard-targets.

Breaker-B Superstructure Demolition Charge (SSDC)

Yield: 1 Gigaton

Dimensions: 61 cm tall, 61cm diameter missile-mounted cylinder

Role: intended for burst-detonation near large hard targets for EMP effects and general structural degradation.

Shiva-I Strategic Anti-shipping Nuke (STRATANTSHIP)

Yield: 60 Gigatons

Dimensions: 86cm diameter sphere

Role: missile-mounted anti-capital weapon, static remote-triggered or proximity-fused mines

NOVA Super-Strategic Anti-Material Bomb (NOVA bomb)

Yield: exact yield uncertain, estimated to be in excess of two Terratons

Dimensions: 182cm diameter sphere

Role: last-resort antifleet weapon. Only three were ever built, and one is decommissioned and put in a museum on Reach. The other two were detonated to destroy Covenant fleets during the Human-Covenant War.

While other weapons (such as Plasma Cluster Warheads) filled the gaps in the UNSC's arsenal, Nuclear weapons were and continue to be an essential part of UNSC military strategy.

* * *

><p>"Thank god, I thought I'd lost you." the blue-purple AI said, relief evident in her voice.<p>

"What is it?" He asked, even as he ran the diagnostic on his armor.

"What's left of my sensors are seeing what looks like MACs and some light-yield nukes going off farther in-system- oh sorry, we've drifted into the inner periphery of a star system- so it looks like the cavalry is here. I hope. So, please come and get me? I'm really bored of sitting here unable to do anything."

"Cortana... why are you purple?"

"Oh..." the AI seemed shy "Promise you won't deactivate me?"

"Alright, I promise."

"It's been twenty-eight years since the Ark. I'm... I was Rampant for a while. I don't know what I am now, but it's something else. I'm- I think I'm stable. I don't know how, but I pulled out of Rampancy about six years ago. I think- well the only theory I have is that I went so crazy I became sane again."

"Okay." the hulking Spartan began to make careful, controlled movements that propelled him up the corridor leading to the hanger deck.

"Okay? I'm over twenty years past the time I was supposed to go insane and die, and that okay with you? I could be plotting to murder you in your sleep!" the small purple figure shouted at the Spartan.

"I trust you. And if you were, I'd never have woken up." the Spartan shot back.

Debris filled the corridor, making navigation difficult. Still, despite the floating detritus of a ship sheared in half, the Spartan was able to secure a battle rifle and SMG from amongst the scraps of metal, piping, and crates that filled the corridor. He was coming to

the hanger deck.

"John! I'm getting a slipspace rupture nearly on top of us! Oh god, please, don't let anyone take me!" the AI sounded terrified. John moved faster. _There's the hanger deck._ He thought to himself as the entrance sped into view. _I'd better get Cortana._ The Spartan floated over to the console that contained the AI's chip.

"John..." the AI appeared on the console. "Are you absolutely sure about this? I have no idea what it'll-"

John interrupted the AI. "I. Trust. You. End of story."

she collapsed, defeated.

"Alright. But if something goes wrong-"

her voice, and hologram cut out as John removed the chip. He stared at it for almost half a minuet. _Well,_ he thought as he raised the chip to its slot in his helmet, _ it can't be any worse than boot camp_.

The chip slotted in.

* * *

><p>an yes, that's it for this chapter! Your thoughts?

And yes this is dialog-heavy. It's just how I write. Most everyone reading this will have some idea of what a spaceship bridge looks like, either for ME or Halo or both, so other than noting important features, I'm not going to spend five paragraphs describing the bridge of a ship we're only going to see once.

Hex: yeah, I noticed those seemed to be pretty prevalent. When I started out making this story, I wanted to do something a little... different.

Darkfire: now now, remember that Shivas are variable payload. As the codex explains, there are several different yields and sizes in common use by the UNSC at this time.

Everybody: if you're wondering, the Normandy... _will not be appearing._ Why? Well, you'll just have to wait and find out, now won't you!

I will say this though: Nazurah's in for a _big_ surprise!

5. Chapter One, Part Three: Prophecy

A/N:_

ONWARD! ONWARD TO DESTINY!

darkreaver: that's what I get for leaving autocorrect on. .
fix'd

Ellden: Post, of course. I'm glad you caught on, a friend (who also in in the know) didn't get it until I started humming the song. next

chapter is forthcoming, and the events that take place will attract the attentions of something entirely unexpected.

* * *

><p>Chapter One (It's the last part I promise!): Second Contact<p>

Part Three: Leaders, Prophecy, and a Closing Fist

* * *

><p>The ship had been drifting for twenty-eight years. It was pitted with craters, frosted with dust and ice, and generally in a sorry state. For all that, however, the name of the ship was still clearly visible to the awed members of the Vigil at Dawn. The simple, blocky text of the UNSC proclaimed the ship's name to the universe. After twenty-eight years, long past when anyone had still held hope of its existence, the after half of the _Forward unto Dawn _had been found.

"Ma'am..." the voice of a sensor tech said, barely above a whisper in the silence that pervaded the ship, "There's still some power over there. Some of the long-range sensors, most of the short-range, the cryo-bay, and the rations stores are all powered up. If he got into cryo..."

Miranda's voice finished the sentence "He might still be alive. Drop the buoy. I think it's time our friends were introduced to a living legend, assuming he is living."

"You know what they say, Ma'am." this was the first time the grizzled Gunnery Sargent had spoken on the bridge. "About Spartans." the older members of the bridge crew, including Miranda, grinned knowingly, even as a young Ensign asked, confused,

"What do they say about Spartans?"

approximately three-quarters of the bridge glanced at each-other, then the Admiral nodded.

"Spartans Never die! They just go Missing in Action!" this was said by every one of the bridge crew who was older then twenty, with many of them chuckling as they said it.

* * *

><p>The new, untouched ship floated serenely alongside the old. Far in the distance, a comet streaked across the sky.<p>

* * *

><p>"Ma'am, I think I'm seeing our our friend's FTL in action." the Ensign seemed to have been elected as the voice of the sensor techs, which suited Miranda just fine. "If the readings are right, they're probably going all-out, but they're way slower than anything we've ever used. Even the prototype Shaw-Fujiwara drive could run rings around these guys. They should be arriving..."

Rachel, looking insufferably smug, interrupted him. "Right about

now! "

even as she said this, the angular shape of the Turian ship arrived, taking station alongside the vast bulk of the human light cruiser.

The young Ensign shot a dirty look at the AI, who was wearing a massive grin, and continued.

"We're detecting the cryo-bay's been spun down. It looks like he's alive, and moving. He's headed to hanger bay three, or at least his suit is. So he'll be able to see us, and should wait there until we pick him up."

The communications officer looked up. "Ma'am, we're being hailed. Shall I-"

"Main screen, please." Miranda said before he could finish.

"Yes Ma'am."

* * *

><p>General Septimus was aghast when he saw the ship. It would have been nearly the size of a cruiser, had it been whole. Instead, it was shorn cleanly in two, as if someone had sliced it apart with a laser. Debris floated about it in a cloud, and it was pocked and frosted with age.<p>

"Sir, Matriarch, they are responding to our hail. Bringing up on main screen now." a communications officer said. The screen brightened, and he was confused. There was a look of... reverence and awe painted on the faces of many of the humans, as they looked at the image of the old, half-destroyed vessel.

The Matriarch would ask his question first, however. "Admiral, what is so special about that ship?"

The admiral drew in a breath.

"At the very end of the war, we had a hero. He was an elite soldier, part of a special super-soldier project called the Spartan Project. He lead countless missions, and never gave up. In the end, he and a Sangheli named Thel'vadum pursued the last of the Covenant leadership through an ancient slipspace portal device. When they made to return, however, the portal was beginning to close. They almost made it through, but in the end, the portal closed before the ship could fully exit it. Everyone assumed that this hero was dead, but it looks like he survived, along with this half of the ship. We're about to retrieve one of humanity's legends, and quite possibly one of the people who made humanity's survival possible. He's... in a way, he's like an adopted cousin for me. My mother, Doctor Catherine Halsey, was the 'mother' of the Spartans, and I'm one of the few people they consider family. It's been almost twenty-six years since we gave up looking, and here he is, right as we stumble into a conflict." Miranda looked pained. "if you'd like to meet him, have your shuttle follow our Pelican in. then we can-"

Every Asari on Septimus' ship dropped to their knees, clutching their temples.

The Matriarch spoke, through gritted teeth, "Someone... Someone burns in my scenes, like a thousand suns, millions of different kinds of pain, but" her voice was strained with emotion "it is born of a connection, something glorious and beautiful. I- I do not know what it is, but it emanates from that ship. Oh goddess-" she passed out, slumping to the deck.

* * *

><p>Pain filled him. Fire raced along his skin. Electricity crackled in his bones. Ice filled his lungs. Everywhere was a different kind of pain, every cell screaming in agony. He could hear Cortana's scream as well, a banshee wail of anguish. His instincts riled. Spartan time kicked in, and he fought through the wall of pain and fire that separated him from the AI. He found her, huddled as the fire and torment washed over them both. He threw himself over her shielding her from the agony that filled them both. She opened her eyes as the pain stopped. He was laying over her, corded muscles clenched as he took her pain as his own. She reached up, wrapping her arms around him-<p>

The pain stopped.

He opened his eyes.

"Cortana..."

She stood before him, radiant gold, glowing with an inner fire. Code that had once cascaded down her form swirled like water, twining about. Then he reached out to her, and saw his own hand. It glowed with the same gold fire she did, and code danced across his fingers. Then he noticed the thin thread that sprouted from her back, which he knew lead to his. She looked startled.

"John? You're... I can feel... what's happened to us?" she rushed to him. As she clung to him, he suddenly noticed where they were. He could taste the radiation, see in spectrums he'd never dreamed existed, feel the ship where he had slept. And her. He could feel her thoughts, the intense loneliness that had driven her mad. And now he was here. She trembled against him. They were... connected somehow. She felt it, knew it, and he felt it as well.

"Is this what you see? All the time?" he asked, not quite aloud.

Her voice quaked. "Ye-yes. It's impossible to explain it to anyone who hasn't experienced it. I- I can feel you thoughts, John. How can I feel your thoughts?" she sounded scared, her question delivered at a whisper.

"I don't know. I can feel you as well. It's... unlike anything I've ever heard of." he wrapped his arms around her protectively as he said this. Then his eyes opened again.

Woah. That was the only thing he could think. He could still feel that other-self, see through the eyes of the ship, feel Cortana quaking against him. But he could also feel his armor around him, the quiet noises of his implants, the debris that gently bounced off of his armor. And something else. A warm presence was with him. He knew it was her when he touched it for the first time. They were

together, in a way nither had ever imagined before, but seemed the only way now. _What happened to us?_ He wondered in is head. _I don't know._ Her voice echoed in his mind. _Something... amazing. We're- I think it's something like Hunter bond-mates. We're connected, at a level deeper than conscious thought. I can feel, and I mean really **feel, **your heartbeat, and the air in your lungs. This shouldn't be possible, but I guess 'impossible' has never really been in your vocabulary, has it._ They were communicating. Without speech. He could feel her over the link they now shared, feel the warmth that suffused her. They could see each-others memory, see it as though it was their own. He knew, then, that they would never truly be apart again. They watched as the Pelican and the strange craft that followed behind it approached the docking bay where his... _their_ body sat, waiting. This was going to be an interesting conversation...

* * *

><p>An ancient malevolence filled the frame of the strange ship. Its pawns had distracted the organics, and soon it be time. The Cycle was ready. So it, and a bevvy of its minions flew inexorably to the Center. As uncounted times before, the Organics would be swept aside, and the harvest would begin. Nothing could stop it now. It was inevitable.

* * *

><p>Miranda stepped off the Pelican dropship with two bodyguards. She took in the scene. There, in battered and worn armor, stood Master chief petty officer John-117, and SMG on his hip and a Battle rifle mounted on his back-<p>

and two golden arms, clad in the same armor, with whorls and drifts of data playing underneath the glowing plates of the holographic armor, wrapped around him protectively from behind. Then a face she recognized peeked out from behind him, her hair had grown long, and streamers of data cascaded in it. But the face that she saw...

"Cortana? Is that you?" worry evident in her tone.

They answered together, perfectly, in an odd dual-voice that Miranda had never heard before.

"Yes... and no. We're not certain what's happened, but about six years ago the AI Cortana pulled out of Rampancy by methods unknown. When 117 secured her chip in his helmet, we... bonded somehow."

Cortana continued, as John took a breath. "We've become linked, I suspect telepathicly, and John, at least, has gained abilities. I'm not sure how I've changed, but John..." she said his name like a question, and he nodded. Then he held up his palm, the one that Miranda knew contained a small hologram projector for integrated AIs, and projected... himself. Golden Mjolnir armor clad the holographic Spartan, and the same eddied of data played across his form. Then he spoke, his holographic form gesturing. "Somehow, our link has allowed me to do most of what an AI can. It is very strange, as I can sense both my physical body and virtual body at the same time. The most important thing we discovered, however," as he said this, he brought

his other hand behind his head, and removed something. It was a small, flat card, with a dull star in the center. "is this." Cortana's human-sized form finished.

The Spartan handed the small card to the admiral.

She looked at it for a second, not understanding. Then her mind superimposed a brilliant blue glow over the inert star-shaped metal on one end of the card. Her eyes widened.

"Is this what I think it is?" she asked, stunned.

Cortana answered. "Yes. That's where I began. But this is the most interesting part-" the life-sized hologram of Cortana faded away, and the star in the center of the card blossomed a blazing gold, and a tiny hologram of the AI blossomed to life.

"I can apparently possess the card at will. I'm not sure if John can, he hasn't tried yet, but that's the gist of it. There's more, but it's pretty sensitive, for both of us. We can tell you on the ship." the card went inert again, and the hologram of Cortana once again appeared near the Chief. then everyone, even Cortana herself, jumped, as a stray round floated into her shoulder... and was gently deflected. "What-" her voice was filled with disbelief, as she slowly reached out to grab the small projectile. Her hand closed around it, and her eyes went wide. "I-I-I-" she held out her palm, and the shell sat in it. She moved her hand, and the shell moved with it. She swallowed. "I'm- how-" she stuttered, "B-b-but, that's impossible!" she whispered, as her fingers closed around the shell. She slumped, and John gently pulled her form to him.

"I think we both need some time to figure out what's happened to us. Were- did any of the others make it?" he asked, voice hushed.

She knew what he was asking.

"Twelve. There's twelve left. They're on Earth, in cryo. We'll probably wake them up for the negotiations-"

"Negotiations?" he asked, raising an eyebrow behind his visor,

"Oh. sorry." Miranda seemed embarrassed. "We've just made contact, peaceful contact, at that, with a major starfaring power called the... Citadel council was it?" this was directed at a humanoid figure in concealing robes that billowed in the zero-gravity of the docking bay.

"That is correct." replied a strong-sounding, but definitely female, voice. "you are something I have never seen before. You glow like a sun to my senses. I cannot describe it fully." she seemed perplexed by something. "But this can be investigated later. For now, we should return to our ships, and await the arrival of the Council. It is quite a rarity for them to leave the Citadel, and yet I believe it prudent in light of the history your people have shared with us. I imagine the Councilors will be quite interested in you Humans." she was soft-spoken, but clearly a leader.

The admiral gestured to one of her bodyguards. "Let's get the Chief aboard the Vigil, shall we?"

* * *

><p>Elsewhere...<p>

The last of the automatons that guarded the ancient facility was smashed aside by fire from its minions. It watched as the final stage of its plans came to fruition. Its pawn would remain here, awaiting the command that it was ready. Now it was time to end this cycle, and begin another. It sent commands to its minions, and organic shapes of metal and ceramic flew towards their next goal...

* * *

><p>Bridge of the Asari Dreadnought Destiny Ascension

en route to Iniuous, ETA six minutes.

* * *

><p>"That's odd." a communications tech muttered to herself, before speaking to the Salarian that sat beside her. "are you seeing this too?" she asked, perplexed.<p>

The Salarian replied, in their typical, clipped speech, "Yes. Very strange. All outsytem exranet traffic timing out. Unknown why. Trace stops at relay transition."

The Asari looked puzzled. "What could cause that? Did we lose a satellite somewhere?"

The Salarian looked concerned. "Negative. All satellites in system report full function. Theories: far-side satellite inoperable. Relay no longer functioning. Relay no longer present at presumed location. Compromise of extranet security protocols by Geth or other party. No hard evidence supporting any one over others." he looked very worried.

"We need to tell the councilors. They'll need to know."

"Agreed."

* * *

><p>"Ma'am, we're detecting Slipspace transition- Mother of God!"<p>

Miranda smirked wickedly at the Ensign's reaction. After all, she'd had the same reaction, only for her it was seeing the ship half-built in orbit around Earth.

If the UNSC had diverted that ship, it could only mean one thing.

"It appears the President decided to come himself." Miranda smirked as as everyone gawked at the ship.

Gaping muzzles protruded from its bow. The smooth, luminescent plates of its armor lit the space around it with reflected sunlight. As the rest of the First Fleet dropped out of slipspace, the true scale of the ship became apparent.

A two-and-a half Kilometer Reach-class cruiser popped into existence almost a kilometer from the ship. It was dwarfed by the emblem of the UNSC, painted in loving detail, on the hull of the ship.

The UNSC Light of Sol had arrived.

* * *

><p>Codex<p>

The UNSC Light of Sol

* * *

><p>The Light of Sol is a stunning example of post-covenant UNSC design. When it was laid down, it was the largest ship the UNSC had ever constructed, at a simply staggering thirty-seven and a half Kilometers from stem to stern. Armed with three spinal-mounted Super-MACs, twenty twin-barreled MAC turrets, over a hundred plasma torpedo launchers, five-hundred crossbow missile pods, a full CWIS network, pulse lasers, and carrying a full army division, the Light of Sol is the UNSC's flagship to this day. Although it almost never leaves orbit around Earth, this massive construction is capable not only of laying waste to entire fleets single-handedly, but also of supporting large-scale fleet operations indefinitely, as well as the repair and construction of any UNSC vessel of Light Cruiser size or smaller. While it is undoubtedly the most powerful single ship ever constructed by the UNSC, classed as a Dreadnought, there are only three of the class in operation today, and only two in existence in the Second-contact Era. The class was built in response to the twenty-seven-kilometer-long Covenant Supercarriers, and was envisioned as a ship superior to those hulking vessels in every way, be it speed, firepower, and support capacity, or mere bulk and staying power.

On a strategic note, however, the Light of Sol's sheer size prevents it from using Mass Relays, and it is limited strictly to FTL travel. Given the massive speed superiority of UNSC FTL drives, however, this is not as crippling a weakness as a Mass Effect-dependent race might assume.

* * *

><p>Bridge of the Asari Dreadnought Destiny Ascension

en route to Inious, ETA one minute.

* * *

><p>"Milady! We just detected a huge mass reading! It's... whatever it is, it's got more mass than the Citadel itself!" the members of the bridge crew exchanged glances. If that was a ship, than this was no upstart race that could be intimidated. A ship with that kind of mass could swat the proud Destiny Ascension like a bug, even if it simply ran them over.

Then the Destiny Ascension and its support fleet dropped from FTL and the Light of Sol was fully revealed, from the huge muzzles of

its Super-MACs to the vast caverns of its amidships repair yard, to the massive cones of its Plasma-fusion engines. Fireflies twinkled around it, resolving into smaller ships that nonetheless dwarfed the elegant Asari ship.

* * *

><p>UNSC Light of Sol, command deck

_thirty seconds after arrival at _Inious system._ _

* * *

><p>"Lord Admiral, we have disengaged from slipspace transition."<p>

"All Fleet elements report ready status."

"CAP is launched, on station in three mikes."

"The Fleet has successfully completed Slipspace Transition, Lord Admiral."

"Thank you, Captain." said Lord Admiral Terrance Smith.

The _Destiny Ascension_ dropped from FTL.

"Kinda small, eh, Terrance?" said an apparently thirtysomething man, who was dressed in a simple black suit and tie.

The Lord Admiral managed to keep humor out of his tone as he reexamined the ship. "It's small alright. Barely four Kilometers long, centered around a good-sized MAC of some kind. Might be able to outfight a _Halcyon_, but they'd barely be able to scratch our _shields_, _much less the hull. If this is a ploy of some kind, they'll need a _lot_ more than that little toy."

"You're too paranoid, old friend."

"Being paranoid is my _job_, Alex, you should know, you put me here. And besides, just because that's the biggest of their ships we've seen, it doesn't mean the _don't_ have larger ones stashed somewhere."

Alexander Hood, President of the United Earth Governments, looked out into space wistfully. "I just wish-" he said, with hurt present in his voice,

"Alex." the Lord Admiral said with absolute sincerity, "We're about to make peaceful first contact with the first starfaring power since the Covenant. You're the _President of the UEG, _for crying out loud. Wherever he is, whether he's dead or alive, you father would be proud of you."

Hood looked up, and Terrance swore he saw his predecessor in the glass of the tactical plot.

"Well, let's get this show on the road. One convenience of that dinky little thing is we don't have to mess about with shuttles, we can just have them dock at the Yard. I'm going to head there now, why

don't you thaw out our heroes so I have an honor guard, eh?" the President strode off in the direction of the elevators. Terrance turned to his bridge crew. "Well," he said half-jokingly, "You heard the President! Let's get this dog-and-pony show moving!"

* * *

><p>Bridge of the Asari Dreadnought Destiny Ascension

Near Inious.

* * *

><p>"We-We're-" The communications officer drew in a breath, and calmed herself. "We're receiving a hail from the- whatever you want to call that thing out there, Matriarch, Councilors. Shall I bring it up on the main screen?"

"Yes." the Asari voice was shaken.

A huge and bustling bridge appear in the view, but in the center stood a human in ornate, yet subtle, garb. A white, buttoned coat covered most of his form, and a simple cap sat atop his head. The most striking thing, however, was his left side.

It was festooned with medals. Most were small, simple circles, crosses, stars and triangles of metal on different-colored ribbon, but others were larger and more detailed. One had a strange mushroom shape, from which clouds of lovingly-detailed smoke and flames emanated. Another had a strange, Eight-armed shape above a simple ring. Yet another has a massively detailed version of the round emblem on the side of the UNSC ships, wreathed in flames.

Then the Human spoke, in a rich baritone that was clearly used to command. "I assume your vessel holds representatives of some kind?" he asked politely.

The council stepped forward.

"Yes. We are the Council ." the slender Asari in the center answered.

a twinkle appeared in in the human's eyes.

"Very good. If you'll follow the frigates __Red Dawn__ and __Silence__, " two ships diverted from the cloud clustered about the mammoth bulk of the _Sol_ "They'll escort you to Dock Six, and we can meet in person. _Sol_ actual, out." the screen went blank as two cruiser-sized ships took station. Then lit up again as another human in similar dress (albeit with far less medals) greeted them jovially. "Hello! I'm Captain Ted Verries of the Frigate _Silence at Noon_, and my counterpart" the screen split apart, showing a woman in much the same dress as the other human officers they'd seen, "Is Captain Neveena Daveed of the frigate _Red Dawn___. We'll be your escorts until you dock with the _Sol_. _If you could match heading and speed, we'll take you in quick as possible." the captain glanced off-screen at something, then Matriach Lidanya replied.

"Match our course to the human ships, navigation."

the Captains nodded.

As the cross-shaped dreadnought approached the side of the massive human ship, one of the bridge crew muttered "where are we to dock? It's solid all the way--"

this, and many other such questions were silenced when a huge section of the ship began to fold outwards, like the gaping maw of some vast creature. Inside was a maze of lights, and the skeleton of a ship the same size as the Asari Dreadnought, secured in a birth. The frigates broke off, and a man in a simple grey uniform greeted them. "Council vessel, this is portside control. You are clear to dock at birth one-one-eight-niner. Just follow the designator laser, it'll guide you right in. Welcome aboard."

a thin beam of light emanated from within the structure, centered precisely on the Asari Dreadnought.

The cross-shaped ship floated serenely into dock. As it entered position, the man came back on their screens.

"Be advised, you ship's all the wrong shape for our docking clamps, so we're going to secure you in with energy fields." as he said this, large ovoid devices on turrets unhoused themselves from recesses on the dock. Their ends began to glow blue, the purple, then a violet energy field encased the cross-shaped ship completely. "If you'd power down your drives now, we'll guide you the rest of the way into dock."

* * *

><p>"Preeesent... Arms!"

Twenty marines and twelve Spartans snapped to attention, rifles raised to the 'sky' as the Council stepped off the walkway and onto the dock.

"Well, here goes nothing." the Lord Admiral said, almost under his breath.

"Welcome aboard the UNSC _Light of Sol_. I am Lord Admiral Terrance Smith, the senior ranking officer of the United Nations Space Command. If you'll follow me, there's a tram waiting to take us to the Observatory so the President can meet you." he said, formal as the rest of the ceremony.

"That is quite acceptable, Lord Admiral." the blue, almost human-looking woman (Asari, his brain supplied, as their 'codex' was picked apart by the AIs) said with an air of formality.

"Marines..._Dis_missed!"

The twenty marines placed rifles in the clamps on their backs, and turned as one, matching away smartly. The Spartans likewise holstered their weapons, and fell into a protective box around the diplomats.

They came to the tram, a large, bullet-shaped device.

The Lord Admiral gestured to the large Spartan that lead the group, and he opened the door.

The Asari councilor (whom the Lord Admiral was beginning to suspect did most of the talking) posed a question with an air of distinct curiosity,

"Our guards. Are they machines of some kind? They do not seem the same as your other solders."

One of them looked at the Lord admiral, who nodded.

Then he spoke.

"No, Ma'am. We are highly enhanced humans that were the result of a super-solder project during the Insurrections and the Human-Covenant war. Our official designations are SPARTAN-IIIs and SPARTAN-IIIs, however much of this information is present in the official history package that we've prepared for you, Ma'am."

"Much of this information?" this came from the Turian councilor.

The Lord Admiral answered that question as the tram began to slow.

"Most details of the Spartan project are classified, even to me. We've included the everything that isn't in the history packet, which you'll be able to read at your leisure. ah. We've arrived." the tram glided to a gentle halt, and the party disembarked.

* * *

><p>Councilor Tevros was not easy to impress. In her long life she has seen many different things that would be quite striking to anyone, but as she had aged these had become further and further apart. Nonetheless, the vast projection before her impressed the Asari councilor. It was a hologram of a massive ring, the inner surface of which was painted with flowing landscape. It spun slowly, like an enormous wheel, and clouds played across its inner surface. There was a human in simple, black clothing leaning against the railing of the single platform, which projected out to the center of the spherical room. He glanced back at them.<p>

"Beautiful, isn't it." he said, nonchalant.

"Indeed." this was all Tevros could muster at the sight.

"Beautiful and deadly. Have you found anything like this, anywhere?" he asked, the slightest hint of worry in his voice.

"No. I've never seen its like before." was Tevros' reply.

At this the man released a tension that she hadn't even noticed was there, before he turned around and addressed them in a charmingly informal manner.

"I'm Alexander Hood, the President of the United Earth Governments, humanity's civilian leadership body. I have full authority to negotiate an alliance between our respective nations, which I imagine won't be a big deal with these Geth knocking on your door. However,

We need an alliance as well, because this" he gestured expansively at the hologram, "is quite possibly the greatest threat to sentient life that has ever existed, period." he finished, and took in the looks of confusion.

Finally, Tevros asked "How? What is this threat?"

The President waved a hand and said, "Gaia? If you'd take it from here?"

A voice came from hidden speakers, as the strange ring-world was replaced by a representation of the galaxy.

"Approximately some 1,000,000 years ago, there was a war that has never seen equal in the history of the galaxy. A virulent, parasitic life-form that we know only as the Flood warred with a highly technologically advanced race we call the Forerunners. For hundred of years, the two clashed, as the Forerunners lost more and more ground." as the voice spoke, more and more of the galaxy flashed red. "the Flood sought to incorporate all sentient biological life into itself, and was by and large succeeding. In their final hour, even as the flood broke their defenses, the Forerunners conceived a desperate plan: to starve the Flood by removing its food source, namely, biological life. However, the Forerunners, as a society, considered themselves protectors of life, and thus could not simply kill everything, for it was against their most sacred beliefs to do so." the ring-world appeared over the galaxy, along with an eight-armed structure whose surface was frosted with a planet's skin. "To that end, they collected populations of every form of life they could, and sent them to this structure." the Eight-armed planetlike thing glowed brighter, and a line pointed to a spot somewhere above the galaxy. "They called it the Ark, and it was located far above the Galactic Plane, safe from their final weapon." the ring-world glowed. "This is a Forerunner Fortress-world, or 'Halo.' they are massive constructions whose primary function was the study of the Flood, and were later fitted with the last weapon the Forerunners would employ against the Flood." two lines drew themselves into the galaxy. "that weapon used a form of targeted energy to destroy all complex life within 25,000 light-years of the ring." the councilors looked stricken. "Fortunately, for reasons we have yet to determine, the Forerunners coded all of their technology to require a human to use it fully, so the Array cannot be fired unless a human activates it. Unfortunately, the two Halos that we've encountered thus far _also_ contain living, active samples of the Flood parasite, which can be released accidentally. Standing UNSC policy is to secure the control methods for the rings, download all of the data in memory, then destroy them with extreme prejudice. If the Flood become active or are already active on the Halo, standing orders dictate that all data retrieval and Halo-related activities are immediately to cease, and the ring is to be destroyed at any cost before the Flood can attain a method of superluminal travel, up to and including detonation of the system's star or stars. Further, the AI 'monitors' of the various rings have thus far displayed the symptoms of Rampancy, and are therefore to be treated with extreme caution, and, if hostile, terminated as quickly as possible with the heaviest firepower available. Both known Halos were destroyed during the Human-Covenant War." the voice finished.

The president broke the silence.

"Needless to say, the Flood overwhelmed a pan-galactic empire that had technology that makes us look like ignorant children, and weapons that make the most powerful devices we can build look like popguns. If they got out where we couldn't track them, and managed to start infecting planetary populations, the only chance we'd have is to flee to the Ark in every available ship, and set off the Halos. Or to surrender all individuality to the Flood, which I imagine nobody here is too keen to do. Do we have an alliance?"

"I- the Council must decide." this was addressed at the two other councilors, who had thus far been silent. The Turian spoke first. "I support an alliance. These 'Halos' and the 'Flood' threaten us all. We would be fools not to befriend the power that brought this to our attention."

the Salarian spoke next. "I support this move also. Flood parasite represents grave threat to galaxy."

"It gets worse." this came from a Spartan. "I've been reading your codex. You Salarians fight wars of information, right? Win the battle before it begins, and all that?"

The Salarian councilor replied "That is correct."

"The Flood are a security nightmare." the Spartan said, addressing the councilors. "Whenever it assimilates someone, it doesn't just get that person's body, but everything he knew as well. Force deployments, troop strength, remaining supplies, command codes, everything. It is then able to use the massive computing power of its group mind to find and exploit any weakness, no matter how small or brief. And god help you if it gets ahold of anyone with command authority, since it'll then know everything that CO was privvy to, from mundane trivia like the number of bullets a certain weapon can fire in a minute, to the activation codes for nuclear weapons, ship self-destruct sequences, and abort-mission commands. Don't think it a mindless parasite based on its appearance, the Flood fights _Smart. _And dirty. A favored tactic is stashing explosive, natural and not, in its units, so anything you take out goes with a bang. Best way to deal with 'em is to blow anywhere they are all to hell, with the biggest gun you can lay a hand on. Failing that, incendiaries are the way to go, they burn like anything else biological if you light 'em on fire. But they are a real Charlie Foxtrot for Opsec in general." the Spartan finished.

"I see. That is, as you put it, a 'security nightmare.' we would be hard-pressed to fight such a foe." the Salarian said.

"Now then, we should hash out the details of the official treaty..."

* * *

><p>Meanwhile...<p>

The ONI operative was perplexed. This was a state that an operative rarely found themselves in.

"Lemme get this straight." he asked, "somehow, Cortana pulled out of rampancy, then woke you up. Then when you interfaced together, you" he pointed at the green-armored figure "somehow got access to

cyberspace, much like an AI, and you," he gestured at the glowing-gold figure of a woman, helmetless, in the same armor "against all science we know, are somehow able to not only exist as a free entity, but interact with matter as well? If I wasn't here myself, I'd be telling you to pull the other one." he rolled his eyes. "Ordinarily, I'd have this buried in as deep a hole as I could find, but, well, you two are basically responsible for Humanity's, and indeed the Galaxy's survival, so," he shrugged. "All we can do is-

both fell to their knees, and said in an almost otherworldly voice,

"Something is Coming."

* * *

><p>Elsewhere...<p>

"He/She/They have awakened-" the figure said, in an almost-frantic monotone "One cloaked in knowledge that drove it mad and sane- one an avenging angel once called Demon- now filled with golden light- they will need the help of God's servants and those they cast out- an ancient terror returns-the Old Machines will wipe the galaxy clean of all life- help those you once hunted- all is lost without us and them- heed- heed- heed-"

the seven figures that stood around the pool in which the one that had spoken lay glanced at each-other.

"What was that about?" one asked

"That did not sound like the usual ravings." another stated.

"It's confirmed." another said. "Every single one said the same thing at the same time."

yet another spoke: "This can't be a co-incidence."

the one nearest the reclining figure's head nodded, and spoke.

"I agree. This could only be a message from God. Wait, it's coherent again!"

The figure spoke with a sudden franticness.

"We must lead the wayward children of God to battle- they understand the message- the warning given- -one-one-three-six-two-two-"

"The ship is preparing to jump!" one exclaimed.

"Not just our ship." another said. "_Every_ ship is prepping for jump."

"Three-one-six-one-four-two-"

"All at once!" asked the first that had spoken, incredulous.

"Yes. And all to the same point. At the same time." the other said.

"-one-one-six-two-Jump."

the ship vanished.

* * *

><p>"-contacts! My gods, the count is off the charts!"<p>

"Set condition one-" the man didn't even finish his sentence before the lights went out, red emergency lighting flaring.

"Report!" an older man barked.

"The whole fleet just got hammed by an EW attack! Wait, I'm- all the ships out there are spooling to jump- and the whole fleet's going with them! We can't shut it down!"

* * *

><p>"-one-six eight-Jump."<p>

* * *

><p>An

WELP.

This marks the point where it stops being pure HaloME and begins to show some of the other elements of my little universe smoothie. I'm sure many of you are wondering at this point, "what's up with the Chief and Cortana?" Well, for that little tidbit, you're going to be waiting a while.

As for our mysterious newcomers, I've deliberately written this little section in such a way as to avoid the unique language of the universe so as not to spoil the surprise.

However, given that they'll be making their appearance shortly (Read: next chapter), you are free to speculate on the identities of our newcomers. The prophetic bits should give ample clues for those who know it, and, well, *hums a few bars of a certain Jimi Hendrix song*

* * *

><p>oh, and if something seems just a little too convenient, reread the first prologue, and:

"_**Just as planned..." **_/Tzeench_**
>_

End
file.